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SUBJECT: BIOSECURITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM: PROVINCIAL ENGAGEMENT

Ref: A. Islamabad 580

[1](#)B. Islamabad 581

[1](#)C. Islamabad 1100

[1](#)D. Islamabad 1268

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Biosecurity Engagement Program (BEP) staff visited several institutes and universities in Lahore, Abbotabad, Peshawar, and Karachi in March to further develop areas of collaboration. Common themes included a need for basic lab biosafety and biosecurity training at facilities handling potentially dangerous pathogens, as well as a need for basic equipment to modernize research practices. Virtually all institutes visited were eager to collaborate with the U.S. on lab biosecurity, and related topics. Institute and university leaders acknowledged the decline in visiting experts and collaborators from the U.S. as a result of security concerns, but remained optimistic that new projects would provide opportunities for collaboration. This cable is the fifth in a series of five outlining BEP progress in Pakistan. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Lahore based King Edward Medical College (KEMC) and the University of Punjab expressed interest in basic research, best lab practices and biosafety collaboration with the U.S. Of particular note was KEMC, the oldest medical college in Pakistan, training a range of medical professionals each year. BEP staff met with Vice Chancellor (VC) Professor Mumtaz Hasan who advocated for increased educational exchange with the U.S., including visiting professors and technical experts to improve both curricula and lab infrastructure at the University. The VC called the heads of more than a dozen divisions of the University to meet with BEP for several hours to discuss areas of potential collaboration.

[1](#)3. (SBU) BEP staff met with LUMS (Lahore University of Management Sciences) faculty and visited CAMB (Center for Advanced Molecular Biology, also known as CEMB, Center for Excellence in Molecular Biology) to review projects funded under the U.S.-Pakistan Science and Technology Agreement. LUMS Professor, Fridoon Jawad Ahmood of the biological department requested lab biosafety curricula development at the university, which he said are lacking, despite being one of the best universities in Pakistan. Prof. Dr. S. Riazuddin, Director of CAMB, noted the decline in U.S. exchange with Pakistani scientists due to the security concerns.

[1](#)4. (SBU). A BEP team visited Abbotabad and Peshawar veterinary research institutes, which handle a range of infectious disease agents, including highly pathogenic avian influenza, anthrax, and foot and mouth disease (FMD). Director Dr. Nasir Shah provided a tour of both facilities, which are subordinate to the NWFP (North West Frontier Province) Ministry of Agriculture. The Veterinary Research Institute (VRI) in Peshawar generates millions of doses of

vaccine each year, but lacked basic safety and security measures. NWFP provincial government officials stated that the threat of pandemic avian influenza has increased awareness on the need for improved practices in both agricultural and public health facilities. The BEP team provided basic training to both facilities and is developing follow on projects to improve safety and security measures.

15. (SBU) BEP staff held meetings at the Aga Khan University (AKU) to review ongoing collaborative BEP projects. Joint meetings were held with other Karachi based institutions, including the Pakistan Council for Industrial Research (PCSIIR), Karachi University and several local colleges and public health facilities. Dr. Shahana Kazmi, chair of Pakistan's Society for Microbiology, invited a group of students to discuss realities on the ground in Karachi research institutions. More than a dozen students, representing ten institutions were in attendance. The group described a need for basic improvements within each of their facilities to prevent accidents and improve research. Several students were aware of lab acquired infections, including drug resistant tuberculosis and hepatitis C. BEP plans to hold regular training sessions in Karachi as well as support related projects under the U.S.-Pakistan Science and Technology Agreement.

16. (SBU) Both Lahore and Karachi branches of the Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIIR), requested assistance on chemical safety for their workers as well as neighboring industry partners, citing poor practices and training available in Pakistan. Institute directors mentioned several deadly fires in a textile plants recently in Pakistan which involved hazardous chemicals, and also expressed concern over terrorist groups accessing deadly chemicals and biological materials. Water safety and security was also cited as a major concern, with great interest expressed in the BEP sponsored collaboration with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)

ISLAMABAD 00001448 002 OF 002

currently under development.

17. (SBU) Comment: Pakistan has a number of facilities working with a range of hazardous chemical and biological agents under poor conditions. Lack of infrastructure, basic awareness and training were all cited as common problems throughout the provinces of Punjab, Sindh and NWFP. Institution leaders noted the decrease in international visitors and lack of collaboration, leading to an increased sense of isolation. While BEP support under the U.S. Pakistan S&T agreement now includes projects at several facilities visited, targeted training programs and follow on activities are needed to address the basic biological and chemical safety issues identified. BEP funding to other U.S. agencies can be leveraged to support a range of projects, including USGS, Health and Human Services and Department of Agriculture. End Comment.

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